

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by West Dunbartonshire Council to relocate The Choices Programme from the Skypoint Building in Faifley to the vacated Jamestown Primary Building in Alexandria.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments contained in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*. The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of West Dunbartonshire Council's proposal to relocate The Choices Programme. Section 2 of the report sets out brief details of the consultation process. Section 3 of the report sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal, including significant views expressed by consultees. Section 4 summarises HM Inspectors' overall view of the proposal. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it and then prepare its final consultation report. The council's final consultation report should include a copy of this report and must contain an explanation of how, in finalising the proposal, it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation process and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision. Where a council is proposing to close a school, it needs to follow all legislative obligations set out in the 2010 Act, including notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the centre; any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children and young people in the council area;
- any other likely effects of the proposal;
- how the council intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the proposal; and
- the educational benefits the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

1.3 In preparing this report, HM Inspectors undertook the following activities:

- attendance at the public meeting held on Thursday 9 February 2017 in connection with the council's proposals;
- consideration of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposal, specifically the educational benefits statement and related

consultation documents, written and oral submissions from parents and others; and

- visits to the sites of The Choices, Skypoint Building, Faifley, and Jamestown Primary School, Alexandria and Jamestown Early Learning and Childcare Centre, Alexandria including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 West Dunbartonshire Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*.

2.2 The consultation period ran from Monday 16 January until Friday 10 March 2017. A public meeting was held in Jamestown Primary School on Thursday 9 February 2017 in connection with the proposal. Adverts pertaining to the proposal were placed in local print media and notices displayed in relevant council buildings. The proposal document was made available to a range of key consultees, published on the council's website and made available at relevant educational establishments. There were a total of five responses to the consultation with four being against the move and one being in favour. None of the respondents identified as being a parent or carer of a young person currently attending The Choices Programme. The main concerns related to the increased distance that young people would have to travel to access the new site and the increase in the associated costs to young people and their families of that travel. A total of ten people attended the public meeting where views were split between support for and opposition to the proposal. Again, none of those present at the meeting identified as being a parent or carer of a young person currently attending The Choices Programme. Those present at the meeting welcomed the potential benefits of stronger links and partnership working with the local Haldane Youth Service. Members of the local community sought more information and further clarification about the nature of The Choices Programme in terms of the rationale, function and the numbers of young people attending the provision. Following the public meeting, a further meeting took place with staff to discuss the early plans for the refurbished learning environment.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The current site of The Choices Programme is difficult to access and the building condition is poor. Due to significant investment in the council's school estate over the last few years, all other young people of secondary school age within the authority are being educated in new purpose built accommodation. The move to refurbished premises will allow for an annual rental saving for the Education Services budget. The new site offers ease of access from public transport supporting the centre's aim of encouraging and enabling independent travel for its young people. The move to refurbished accommodation following significant investment, which has already been approved by the council, will provide a more appropriate and motivating learning environment better suited to delivering a modern curricular experience. A fit-for-purpose industrial kitchen will support and facilitate improved learning opportunities which closely mirror the world of work. Classes for physical education will be able to be held on site. The improved space both inside and

outdoors will better support a richer social and curricular experience for all young people.

3.2 In considering the educational benefits outlined in the proposal, HM Inspectors believe that there are significant potential educational benefits for young people from the relocation of The Choices Programme to the refurbished premises at Jamestown Primary School.

3.3 Teaching and support staff are very positive about the proposal. The present building is in poor condition, overall, despite some refurbishments and some of the teaching spaces are shared with a neighbouring provision. With this lack of dedicated teaching space and with the existing limitations in both space and access to facilities, the current curriculum offer for young people is restricted. Presently, young people are unable to readily access outdoor learning space and are required to travel to access facilities for physical education which incurs additional costs and results in reduced time for learning. Staff are pleased about the level of consultation that has taken place with them about the proposed move and the opportunity they have had to influence the layout and design of the future refurbishment. Staff recognise the opportunity the proposed move provides, to increase the number of young people benefitting from the provision of a more bespoke educational experience should that be required. Potentially, there could be further opportunities to strengthen links with other secondary schools in work related learning, which on the current site would not be possible. The new setting could provide further opportunities to enhance young people's skills in enterprise and skills for life and work. It could further support partnership working which has not been possible on the current site given the ease of access to the Loch Lomond National Park and other facilities. Staff consider that the planned co-location of the Central Support Staff Team would be advantageous given the close proximity and ready access to additional specialist support and expertise. They understand the challenge and importance but welcome the opportunity of developing supportive relationships with the local community surrounding the proposed setting. Some staff are unclear whether the linked early year's facility at the refurbished site would continue to be required when the primary school moves to the new build campus facility in Balloch.

3.4 Young people are positive about the proposal, recognising the shortcomings and restrictions of their current accommodation. Parents who engaged with the process through contacting the council expressed a desire to ensure that following the move to a new site, The Choices Programme maintain their strong links with West College Scotland to provide young people with the most appropriate opportunities to learn and achieve.

4. Summary

West Dunbartonshire Council's proposal to relocate The Choices Programme from its current premises in Faifley to refurbished accommodation in the Jamestown Primary School Building is of clear educational benefit. The council outlines the benefits for children well. The move to refurbished premises will allow staff to better meet the range of pupils needs through a broader curricular offer. The proposal is welcomed by key stakeholders. They feel strongly that the relocation to a refurbished building will provide a much improved environment for learning. In taking

the proposal forward the council should outline in more detail the arrangements that will be put in place should early year's provision continue to be required in the linked facility at the Jamestown Building.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
March 2017**